

Name: 9

Course: 1604

Critique of Term Project for Fr. Ryan, S.J.

1. Bibliography: 9

Excellent Very Good Good Adequate Unsatisfactory

2. Procedure:

Excellent Very Good Good Adequate Unsatisfactory

3. Format:

Excellent Very Good Good Adequate Unsatisfactory

4. Chronology:

Excellent Very good Good Adequate Unsatisfactory

5. Limitation of Subject, i.e., Final Choice of Topic

Excellent Very Good Good Adequate Unsatisfactory

6. General Comment: 14

Splendid — shows real control
and analytical ability — fine
start in research

23

1.

A Research Journal on St. Francis of Assisi

by

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A Paper Submitted to Father Ryan, S.J. of the Religious
Studies Department of Loyola Marymount University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

RS 160

December 1

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INTRODUCTION

St. Francis was born in the little Umbrian village of Assisi in 1182. The son of a cloth merchant, Francis spent his early years indulging in extravagant clothing and fine feasts. The need for deeper satisfaction in his own life and the needs of the poor soon caught his attention however. Seeing that he could not live in two worlds, Francis gave his life over to Lady Poverty. He then spent the remainder of his life growing in his relationship and understanding of Das Heilige and in portraying as clearly as he could to all people the love of his Master and Savior, Jesus.

October 29

I first went to the new Catholic Encyclopedia and looked up both saints John of the Cross and Francis of Assisi. St. John of the Cross was recommended to me by a friend. In the end, however, I desired to learn more about Francis of Assisi. I scanned over the biography of him given in the new Catholic Encyclopedia and found that the information given was more than I could realistically handle in any one sitting. With all of this information my curiosity was raised as to the life and teachings of this man.

October 30

I stopped by the library to find out if Loyola carried any books written by St. Francis, i.e. Opuscula Scti Francisci Assissi, 3rd edition, Quarrachi, Rome, 1949. I found none.

November 1

Today I began to research the life of St. Francis. I read the introduction to the book The Little Flowers of St. Francis. The editor gave a brief outline of the various events and conflicts in the saint's life. He also went into the life of the author of the book.

In reading the editors outline I got a glimpse of St. Francis as being a man of high ideals in a world of harsh realities. Being very zealous in his calling he seemed eager to share this zeal with his companions. His companions, on the other hand, are not portrayed as being able to fully receive his zeal.

They seemed very cooperative in word and oath but as time went on the original spirit of the Order dimmed. Francis' ministry seemed hampered by controversy not among the people to whom he preached the good news, but to his own companions and spiritual brothers. Nonetheless, at the end of his life he felt that he could say along with Paul the apostle, "I have fought a good fight..."

November 6

Today I read the introduction to a book entitled The Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi, edited by Fahy and Hermann. The editors spoke of Francis as being a simple itinerate preacher. His writings were out of necessity more than out of desire. He was an on-the-spot philosopher, speaking out of the situation that he found himself in, rather than a complative sage that dwelt high atop a mountain peak.

November 11

Tonight I read the first twenty-one chapters of St. Francis' Rule of 1221. This writing gave me the picture of classical franciscan writing: born out of necessity, and centered around our Lord's commission given to the apostles as recorded in the tenth chapter of the gospel of Matthew. The text of the Rule, as it appears in english, is very simple in its use of the language. The Rule expresses its author's sincere desire that his friars live more by our Lord's commission and commandment to love oneanother than by a stern legalism that dwells in the

realm of lofty prose and purple robes.

While exhorting his brothers to live by the virtues of obedience, poverty, and chastity; he was also a realist, commanding that they should avoid all situations that would tax their human will (i.e., privately conversing with a women, and so forth). As our Lord Jesus was, so St. Francis was; while maintaining a high spiritual relationship with the Father, Francis was also conscious of the ever-present shortcomings of human nature.

November 10

Last night and today I read St. Francis' letter to all the faithful. The letter is made up of practical exhortations in keeping to our faith in God and in the Catholic Faith. St. Francis uses quite a few quotes from St. John's Gospel. Francis portrays Jesus as being the light of God, the full revelation. But not only a light, as in a lumminous glow, but also the source . And it is not as if there are many lights but one light: by which all men must come if they seek to come to the Father.

Saint Francis' form of mysticism is like St. Paul's in nature: believing that faith in Jesus is the only way to salvation or Brautmystik . The fact that he holds this form of mysticism explains or gives a reason to why Francis was so zealous in telling others about the blessing of God through Jesus. That is, if one holds that faith in Jesus is the only was to salvation, one must confess then that lack of faith in Jesus means damnation. So out of love Francis went out to tell mankind of God's mercy and justice.

In that love which is God (cf. 1 Jn.4:16), I, Brother Francis, the least of your servants and worthy only to kiss your feet, beg and implore all those to whom this letter comes to hear these words of our Lord Jesus Christ in a spirit of humility and love, putting them into practice with all gentleness and observing them perfectly. Those who cannot read should have them read to them often and keep them ever before their eyes, by preserving in doing good to the lost, because they are spirit and life (Jn.6:64). Those who fail to do this shall be held to account for it before the judgement seat of Christ as the last day, And may God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless those who welcome them and grasp them and send copies to others, if they persevere in them to the last (cf. Matt. 10:22).

-The Writings of St. Francis p.99

November 13

Today I read St. Francis' "Praises of God" and his "Canticle of Brother Sun." In "Praises of God" St. Francis portrays God as being a mighty king or gives him a Fatherly Image. God is pictured as the Provider, the great guardian of the Earth. But God is more than a provider, to Francis he is also the provision; God is the supplier and the supply, we have our being in Him. In the "Canticle of Brother Sun," St. Francis calls all creation to praise of our Holy Father in heaven. God is placed along side with our "Brother Sun." God is the light of the world, the giver of reason and order, the revealer of beauty. To Francis, God is not totally revealed in his creation but even the dim shadowy picture that surrounds us is a call from God to worship and praise the benevolent creator.

After reading St. Francis' two works I started to read The Little Flowers of St. Francis. After reading the first few pages I became disappointed in the style of writing that was

being used. In this book the story of St. Francis' life came off as though it was a fairy tale.

I then read Rev. S. Baring-Gould's section on St. Francis in his book The Lives of the Saints. Having some other brief biographies on the Saint, I was not surprised by the fact that Francis had no concrete idea of what direction he was going when he first denounced the world. For a great deal of the time he acted on impulse. He knew that he did not want anything to do with the world system, but what he did want was not clear to him until some years later.

It was not until 1208, two years after his conversion, that it dawned on him what it was that he wanted. While listening to the Mass Francis was struck by the words of the gospel:

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor script for your journey, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor yet staves. And as you go, preach saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

After having the priest expound on the words of the gospel, Francis embraced the gospel's message as God's personal vocation for himself.

November 16

Today and last night I read T.S.R. Boase's St. Francis of Assisi. Boase was very factual in his presentation, though holding a more liberal view point than that of Baring-Gould. Nonetheless, through all the bias and rationalization the beauty found in the simplicity of the man of Assisi shone through.

November 18

Last night and today I read the beginning chapters of Gilbert Chesterton's book St. Francis of Assisi. Earlier I noted how Thomas Boase's book was more liberal in its view of St. Francis than Rev. Baring-Gould's; Well, Chesterton presented an even more liberal view point than either Thomas Boase or Rev. Baring-Gould. Mr. Chesterton presented the situation and environment that surrounded St. Francis rather than the character of Francis himself. The book is very useful in the sense that it attempts to give a clear and concise picture of the society that St. Francis found himself in, as opposed to presenting the virtues of the Saint in an isolated situation.

November 29

Because last week was occupied with putting a paper together for another class I was unable to add any more entries to this journal.

In my last entry I wrote about the difference between the three biographers of St. Francis that I had had the opportunity to read: G.K. Chesterton, Rev. Baring-Gould, and T.S.R. Boase. It was an interesting thing in reading the works of these authors that the more liberal the author's viewpoint on St. Francis, the more he would concentrate on the social climate that Francis found himself then on the character of Francis himself.

At one point T.S.R. Boase writes:

His conversion was, however, no sudden one. Francis was not of those, such as Paul or Augustine, who find in some supernatural event the cataclysmic realization of a

change of heart. Francis seems to have come to it rather by growing thoughtfulness. (St. Francis of Assisi, p.26)

Mr. Boase's observation presents an interesting question: was St. Francis' conversion in reality just the unveiling of his true character or was there an actual change of direction in Francis' life? In a movie released a few years ago about St. Francis entitled Brother Sun Sister Moon Francis is portrayed as going under a real battle with Self, a real "conversion." But to attempt to discuss whether St. Francis' conversion was a change of direction or just an unveiling of his true character could easily fill nine volumes.

To start off, one would need to establish that mankind needs a conversion, that means going into the nature of man -- whether man is essentially good or bad. That one step has kept mankind pondering for the better part of three-thousand years; and there is still no generally accepted conclusion.

The next step would be to establish that there is a conversion or a new way of life to be followed-- that would mean going into the whole salvation story.

The final step would be to establish that St. Francis did, in fact, accept this salvation -- which would mean establishing that men have in the past accepted the promises and way of life prescribed by Jesus of Nazareth.

November 30

I, little Brother Francis, wish to live according to the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and his most

holy Mother and to presevere in this to the last. And I beseech you, my ladies, and I exhort you to live always in this most holy life and poverty. Keep close watch over yourselves so that you never abandon it through the teaching or advice of anyone.

-St. Francis' Last Will for St. Clare

In looking at my past research on St. Francis I suppose that, if this was to be a journal on the study of St. Francis' Mysticism, this journal would be a failure; because in studying the life of the Saint I have been more overcome by the way Francis literally applied his experience with Das Heilige to his life. He was beyond all doubt a mystic of the highest order, as exemplified by his stigmatization on Monte Alverno. But his actual application of the precepts and convictions given to him by God are more an example of his deep mystical relationship to God than any writer's plume could ever set about to write.

Therefore, if I was called upon to write a term project with the research that I have done and the information available to me I would write about something that I haven't discussed about in this journal; That is, the relationship between St. Francis and St. Clare. This topic was impressed upon me by various sections of certain books I had the opportunity of reading.

In covering the relationship of the two saints I would set forth the statement that a very fulfilling relationship -- a relationship blessed by the love of God -- can be experienced by two people living under the strict franciscan code. I would develop this subject by writing about St. Clare's acceptance of the franciscan code, St. Francis' care in avoiding

temptation, and how St. Francis confided in the counsel of the St. Clare when in need.

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to
the LORD say,
"The LORD will surely separate me from his
people";
and let not the eunuch say,
"Behold, I am a dry tree."
For thus says the LORD:
"To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
I will give in my house and within my walls
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
which shall not be cut off.
- Isaiah 56:3-5

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